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ABSTRACT

As part of the evaluation of the Bay Area Writing Project (BAWP), two field studies were conducted to analayze the effects of BAWP training at the school district level. In one field study, three school districts were examined to explore the conditions and context for BAWP training and to identify the resulting impact on school district programs. It was found that teachers and administrators in all three districts were enthusiastic about participating in BAWP programs and that in all three districts there had been similar changes in teacher behaviors and attitudes, student attitudes, composition curriculums, and district composition programs. The participants in the BAWP inservice programs had assumed the tasks of transferring training to other teachers, suggesting that BAWP training does perpetuate itself, but only when central direction and support are available. In the second field study, which reviewed 16 district-initiated holistic writing assessments, it was found that the research designs the districts used were weak because of the absence of comparison groups, the lack of controls, and the lack of correspondence among writing tasks. No district was systematically collecting objective test data to monitor improvement in writing skills, indicating that BAWP may need to make district administrators more aware of the strengths and weaknesses of various designs for collecting and interpreting holistic data. (Author/RL)

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EVALUATION OF THE BAY AREA WRITING PROJECT

A Technical Report

Funded By
The Carnegie Corporation

1979

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FIELD STUDIES REPORT

by

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BAWP Evaluation Unit
September 1979

FIELD STUDIES REPORT

ABSTRACT

Overview: In order to better understand the impact of BAWP training at the school district level, two kinds of field study investigations were conducted. Three school districts were selected for case study examination to explore the conditions and context for BAWP training and to identify the resulting impact on school district programs. The other field study effort involved examining reviews of district-initiated holistic writing assessments. Data from 16 local districts were examined to assess the impact of BAWP on student writing performance.

Impact of BAWP in Three School Districts:

1. A combination of factors common to all three districts established a need for BAWP training. These included: general decline in student writing skills, pressure for accountability of teachers and students (from both parents and school administrators), the desire to use proficiency testing as a positive force for program change, and demands by teachers for training to improve writing instruction.

2. BAWP was seen as the best choice to fill these needs in the three districts because: no other composition inservice was currently available in the Bay Area; BAWP had quickly gained a reputation for successful impact; and BAWP offered an assessment plan which served to satisfy demands for accountability and at the same time improve teaching effectiveness and staff morale.

3. Teachers and administrators in all three districts were enthusiastic about participating in BAWP. They reported inadequate training in teaching composition and hoped BAWP would assist them in establishing common proficiency standards as they worked with other staff members on holistic assessment.

4. Initial contact procedures were the same in all three districts: Individual teachers became convinced of the value of BAWP training (either through direct participation in BAWP summer programs or indirectly by hearing of its reputation), and they sought district administrators' support for instituting BAWP inservice training in the district.

5. Great variety was observed in the types of inservice programs offered and the funding for the activities. In all three districts inservice participants assumed the task of training other teachers through in-district inservices held after BAWP training was completed. This suggests that BAWP training does perpetuate itself, which may account, in part, for the small percentage of districts (15%) inviting BAWP back a second time for standard-length inservices during the years 1975 - 1978.

6. Reported impact attributed to BAWP's inservice training was remarkably similar across the three districts. Changes were noted in teacher behaviors and attitudes, students' attitudes, composition curriculum and district-level composition programs. The similarity of effects in very different contexts attests both to the common needs of all three districts as well as to the strength of BAWP's training.

7. In particular, the changes brought through use of holistic assessment of student writing samples were agreed upon by teachers and administrators in all three districts. They included: a more serious attitude toward acquisition of writing skills on the part of students; greater coordination between writing programs at different grade levels; greater interest in teaching basic writing skills on the part of secondary-level English teachers; higher expectations for the quality of student writing; and more consistent standards for grading papers among teachers of writing.

8. The processes of program change and the role of the district administrators varied greatly among the districts. Where some kind of central direction and support (either through supervision or a coordinated district program) is lacking, however, there are indications that BAWP impact may be short-lived.

Assessment of Student Writing progress:

1. All the designs collected in 16 different districts using holistic assessment of student writing to measure writing progress were found to be weak because of: (1) the lack of comparison groups which could set expected ranges of performance; (2) the lack of correspondence among writing tasks (or lack of measures of topic difficulty) employed at different grade levels and from one year to the next; and (3) the lack of controls to ensure consistency of standards (or reliability of readers) from one reading to the next. Thus none of the evidence collected could be considered rigorous evidence of BAWP impact on student writing skills. According to the qualitative data collected in interviews in the three districts, BAWP training has improved teacher performance significantly, and it is expected to improve student writing skills over a longer period of time.

2. No district was systematically collecting objective test data to monitor improvement in writing skills. All districts participate in the California Assessment Program (CAP) which contains a writing skills component. Because the test content often does not correspond directly to local proficiency standards, and because it is given only at a few grade levels, it was seen in local districts as less valuable in monitoring writing progress than locally-designed proficiency tests.

Recommendations:

1. More careful study needs to be made of the impact of different types of inservice training. The data collection methods of the present study allowed only descriptive conclusions. However the uniformity of reported impact over different types of training, requiring very different funding support, suggests that BAWP should examine the question more carefully in order to choose the most cost-effective training available.

2. BAWP may need to do more than provide training in holistic assessment to give districts adequate measures of student writing progress. They may need to make district administrators more aware of the strengths and weaknesses of various designs for collecting and interpreting holistic data.

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SECTION I: THREE CASE STUDIES

Although BAWP's primary goal is to improve writing instruction by retraining individual teachers, an important corollary is to effect changes in school and district writing programs. The links between BAWP inservice programs, school and district curriculum designs, and final outcomes for students may be difficult to establish and undoubtedly are unique within each district, but self-sponsored testimonials from individual districts received over a period of four years continue to attest to BAWP's influence both on their programs and their outcomes.

In order to better understand BAWP's impact, the Evaluation staff has compiled from these reports two different kinds of information:

1) qualitative descriptions of BAWP impact on school writing programs (including descriptions of the processes of change in district and school programs)

2) reports of quantitative evaluations of student writing progress by local program directors or district administrators, using self-designed essay tests or standardized test data.

The reports from districts' assessments of student writing provide a useful supplement to the BAWP Evaluation's writing assessment by offering additional measures of BAWP impact on student writing performance. They also illustrate various definitions of writing progress and different models for collecting and interpreting data gathered in holistic assessment. The use of writing samples scored holistically in local districts is itself an indication of BAWP impact on participating schools. BAWP has supported the current emphasis in these schools on assessing writing skills through samples of writing. In addition BAWP inservices instructed teachers in many of these districts in the mechanics of collecting writing samples and scoring them holistically. The summaries of local writing assessments in part II below provide, then, an indication of how some districts are using the evaluation tools BAWP disseminates.

Rationale

The Evaluation Unit studied three school districts whose self-sponsored evaluations of BAWP impact reported program change and positive outcomes for student writing performance. Although the three districts differ markedly in:

--- their reasons for offering BAWP inservices
--- costs and types of inservice programs held
--- the degree of central office direction and support for implementing changes after the inservice,

all of the districts report remarkably similar effects in kind, if not in degree. Through a more careful description of variations among each of the districts and their use of BAWP training, some understanding can be gained of the range of contexts in which BAWP can make a difference at the school or district level.

Procedures

Three districts were chosen to participate in structured interviews and site visits, using the following criteria:

--- reported improvement in student writing skills as a result of BAWP contact
--- extended BAWP contact of more than a single school-year inservice
--- variation in types and cost
--- willingness of district administrators to participate
--- amount of direction and coordination from the district administrators subsequent to the inservice

Collection of information varied in the three districts due to scheduling limitations of the Evaluation Staff and, in one case, to the existence of information obtained during the Evaluation Unit's writing assessment and inservice surveys (1977-1978). A summary of the data sources for each district appears below:

TABLE 1 SOURCES OF INFORMATION

		Structured Personal Interviews				
	Site Visits	District Administrator	District Resource Teacher	Building Principal	Teachers	Written Questionnaires
District A	X	1	1	6	1	6
District B	X	1	2	3	0	4
District C		1	0	0	1	10 *

* interviews plus on-site observations from 1977-1978

In addition to these sources, other information for district C was gathered during structured personal interviews with six teachers who participated in the Evaluation's 1977-1978 writing assessment and from the written reports of an observer from the Evaluation Unit who attended some of District C's inservice meetings during 1977-1978. The amount of data on District C retained from past studies allowed us to concentrate on collecting larger amounts of more current information from the other two districts making the resulting descriptions of the three districts comparable in scope.

Demographics

Two of the three districts were quite comparable in size and much larger than the third in numbers of students and teachers.

TABLE 2 DEMOGRAPHICS

	Total No. of Students	Grade Levels	Elementary	Secondary	Total No. of Teachers
District A	22,000	K-12	13,500	8,500	1,000
District B	12,500	K-12	3,300	9,200	720
District C	4,500	9-12	---	4,500	175

Types of Programs and Funding Sources

The three district inservices described here differ markedly in their sources of funding and in the amount and kinds of inservice training received from BAWP.

District A: BAWP provided inservice training for three years in a row in the county containing this district. The programs were advertised among district and county schools. In 1974-75 BAWP offered a ten-session inservice completed in one semester. A second ten-session inservice in 1975-76 was spread out over most of the school year. These two fully coordinated programs were offered through local university and community college extension programs, and teachers paid tuition in order to enroll.

In 1976, the English curriculum resource-teacher for the district participated in the BAWP Summer Invitational Program, returning to the district to lead a number of inservice sessions during the school year, 1976-77. These were devoted primarily to training for holistic assessment, with only one or two offering techniques for teaching writing.

This inservice training was offered at no cost to teachers, thus cost to the district consisted of the curriculum resource teacher's salary. In addition, during the 1976-77 school year, the district funded one full-day inservice workshop for teachers with members of the BAWP staff. In the following year, two half-day workshops were given by a BAWP teacher-consultant other than the district resource teacher.

District B: Over a four-year period BAWP provided speakers and planning consultants to district leaders throughout three Summer Institutes modeled on the BAWP Summer Invitational program. The Institutes varied from the typical BAWP model by having a district teacher without prior BAWP experience serve as a paid coordinator of the inservice. The total of fifty participants who completed the Institutes returned to their schools to serve as resource teachers and to give inservice training at department meetings or special institutes for school and district staff. No exact record was kept of the number of local inservice hours presented by these teachers after the Summer Institutes.

Funding for the summer sessions and for subsequent school-year inservices came in part from district funds in combination with a one-year Title IV-C grant for adopting the BAWP model. In addition, this district was designated a "Target Area School" by BAWP, receiving extra funding from NEH under a special grant to provide enriched training programs for selected districts. This meant that summer participants could be paid as are those teachers in BAWP's Summer Invitational.

District C: Two school-year inservices of the full ten-week model were held, during 1977-1978 and 1978-1979. Support for the two year-long

programs came from the district, which paid the standard BAWP costs of $1,780 per year and offered the program at no cost to teachers.

During the second year of inservice training, one of the schools was awarded Staff Development Funding from the state, under AB 551, which paid for, among other things, a full-day "Writing Institute" staffed by participants from the recently-concluded BAWP inservice program, and offered to teachers in the district who had not participated.

Impetus for Initiating BAWP Programs

We have only limited information about steps leading to the initiation of BAWP programs in the three districts. Nonetheless, some parallels emerge. At the inception of these programs, attention locally as well as nationally was focused on halting a reported decline in writing skills. From its beginning in 1974, BAWP had a local reputation for successful impact and lacked any competitors in the Bay Area. BAWP was quickly identified as a primary resource for local districts interested in improving writing skills.

Interestingly, however, the first appeals to BAWP came from teachers, not from administrators. In all three districts classroom teachers or curriculum-resource teachers initially learned about BAWP, then worked to gain the support of key district administrators necessary for establishing BAWP inservice programs.

District A: Two teachers, one a resource teacher in the county office, one a local school English department chair, worked with BAWP director Jim Gray as members of the California State Curriculum Commission. The county resource teacher identified a need for training in writing instruction in this district and with the help of the local English teachers initiated the first two years of inservice offered

through extension programs of local colleges. In the third and fourth years the district sponsored the BAWP inservices, after making a BAWP-trained English department head the district resource teacher.

District B : Two participants of BAWP Summer Invitational programs who taught at local colleges urged the initial contact between this district's curriculum supervisor and BAWP. Later, the curriculum supervisor credited the assistant superintendent with invaluable support in establishing the district's first Summer Institute.

District C: In response to protests by parents at the decline in writing performance, a few teachers approached the district superintendent requesting inservice training and identifying BAWP as "the best thing around." The first BAWP inservice was then organized and held during the following school year.

District Administration Support of Writing Skills Improvement

In each case, after committing themselves to the first year of inservice, district administrators proved supportive of attempts by teachers to upgrade writing instruction. This interest at the district level took a number of forms in addition to the funding efforts described above. In particular, supportive action was taken by administrators who saw BAWP as helping teachers better prepare students for proficiency tests in writing.

District A: District administrators were not much involved in the first two years of BAWP inservice, although the assistant superintendent was independently active in preparing the district for system-wide program reform which would eventually affect the teaching of writing. The Stull Act, in effect since 1972, called for accountability of educators by

requiring teachers to set goals and measure attainment of goals. In Spring, 1975, a full year before passage of the Hart Bill (AB 3408) mandating competency-based graduation requirements, this district school board adopted competency testing for all high school students as a graduation requirement. During the school year, 1975-76, the assistant superintendent set up committees of teachers to define competency requirements in the basic skills areas, including math, reading, and writing. That spring, his report on proposals to upgrade standards was approved by the school board.

The English teacher who had worked with Jim Gray and been instrumental in organizing BAWP inservices in the district, headed the committee on writing proficiency. In the summer of 1976 this teacher attended the BAWP Invitational Program at Berkeley, and on his return, was named district resource teacher in writing and charged with training staff in the procedures of holistic assessment.

At the beginning of school year 1976-77, the assistant superintendent urged all teachers to adopt as one of their yearly goals, the improvement of writing performance. Competency testing was initiated, with the district resource teacher providing inservices and organizing procedures. Finally, in the 1977-78 school year, the assistant superintendent introduced a monitoring of writing instruction intended to stimulate teachers to coordinate their classroom efforts with the newly defined and tested proficiency standards. He asked teachers to submit quarterly reports listing all writing assignments. Each assignment was to be keyed, if possible, to particular skills, using code numbers taken from the list of competencies that students were to be tested on.

The assistant superintendent acknowledged there had been criticism of the strongly centralized control of curriculum resulting from these demands, but saw his measures as supporting goals the teachers themselves had defined. We were unable to interview teachers to assess opinions of the quarterly reports, but the principals interviewed were unanimously enthusiastic about the "coordination of program content" that had resulted.

District B: This Target Area district's English curriculum supervisor saw the BAWP inservices as an opportunity to develop a district-wide plan for writing instruction. He led the first Summer Institute teachers in designing a "Scope and Sequence Plan for Writing Instruction." He recognized, however, that many teachers would be reluctant to give up old methods in favor of the new plan, unless some measure of accountability was introduced.

Believing that most teachers will "teach to the test", he helped Summer Institute teachers set standards of proficiency which reflected the aims of the new scope and sequence plan at each level. He argued strongly for use of a sample of student writing as a measure of proficiency, in addition to other measures teachers chose.

This administrator exercised strong leadership during this first Summer Institute. He departed from the typical uses of BAWP inservice when he challenged teachers to plan a full district-wide writing program rather than merely acquiring new techniques for use in their individual classrooms. After the Institute, he returned to his more customary low-key advisory role, acting as a resource to teachers attempting to implement the program. He was particularly active in this role after the first writing assessment when results of the testing helped teachers

see the areas of deficiency in their preparation of students and arranged for funding support to provide resource teachers in the individual schools. This supervisor continued to be instrumental in securing funds for further Summer Institutes, and to assist in planning and organizing these programs. District teachers we interviewed respected and valued the work of this administrator, who was described as offering teachers assistance rather than making demands on them.

District C: This district is exemplary of a "grass roots" BAWP experience. It was teachers who initiated contact with BAWP and secured district support for the inservice program. It appears that a few strong teachers in the district were capable and willing to take the initiative in program improvement, and that district administrators played a supportive rather than a leadership role, at first. On the other hand, this is the only one of the three districts relying totally on district funding for their inservice programs. In addition, once the inservice was offered, the assistant superintendent took over publicizing it, with the result that attendance at the inservice was just short of appearing mandatory for all English teachers.

In spite of this visible support and encouragement, the district office did not turn to BAWP teachers for leadership in developing writing proficiency standards, but instead hired a special employee to draw up a proposal. Although teachers were allowed to make suggestions, they did not see them incorporated into the district plan. At this time no agreement exists on district standards other than on the importance of including a writing sample.

Proficiency Testing

The requirements of AB 65 have stimulated all three districts to

institute proficiency testing in all basic skills areas. To a large degree, contact with BAWP in all three districts has resulted from needs arising from proficiency testing. Although specific competency requirements, testing procedures and funding sources differ in the three districts studied, all agree with BAWP's insistence on measurement which uses actual pieces of student writing and have turned to BAWP for direction in how to conduct a holistic assessment of student writing.

Administrators and teachers in the three districts have reported a number of benefits which appear to result from use of the BAWP holistic assessment model in the context of proficiency testing:

--- a more serious attitude toward acquisition of writing skills on the part of students

--- greater coordination between different grade levels' writing programs

--- greater interest in teaching basic writing skills on the part of secondary English teachers

--- higher expectations and greater demands for quality of student writing

--- more consistent standards for grading papers among teachers of writing

The BAWP central staff anticipates such changes as a natural outcome of teacher-run holistic assessments. BAWP assessment requires careful training of teachers to reach agreement for two distinct reasons:

1) the work of discussing papers and reaching agreement is a valuable tool for breaking down parochialism or idiosyncrasy of standards, for developing mutual respect among teachers, and for allowing teachers to learn from one another's perceptions of student writing, which leads to the changes described above

2) the more secure the agreement on standards of scoring, the more reliable the ratings given, and the more useful and accurate the resulting test data

Not all holistic assessments produce adequately reliable scoring of papers. A holistic assessment sponsored by another group than BAWP

reported inadequate reliability of scores from their reading, with the result that writing samples were dropped from proficiency testing in favor of standardized measures. BAWP's careful training procedures, then, not only affect staff development but also improve the chances of continuing use of the measure they advocate by providing relatively reliable scores on student work.

While the three districts tend to report similar effects of assessment on student and teacher attitudes, each district has used the proficiency measures differently in determining what changes should be made in writing programs to improve performance on the tests.

District A: Teachers list class writing assignments in a quarterly report to their principals, keying each assignment to the particular skill it aims to improve. Students who do not pass proficiency requirements at a given level receive a detailed diagnostic sheet identifying the particular writing skills they must work on with their next writing teacher.

District B: Proficiency requirements parallel the teaching goals in the district's "Scope and Sequence Plan." Teachers receive information about what skills students lack whenever they do not pass a particular requirement on the proficiency tests.

District C: After agreeing that a writing sample should be included in the writing proficiency test, the district administration has left the development of appropriate curriculum and improvement of writing performance largely in the hands of the teachers.

Reported Impact of BAWP Training on School and District Programs

In all three districts administrators and teachers stated that BAWP provided a voice of authority which made a crucial difference in obtaining

acceptance of English curriculum change. In some cases, however, teachers proved unwilling to accept the BAWP program until results from pilot proficiency tests made clear that students needed remedial writing instruction. (This seemed particularly true of secondary level English teachers in all three districts.) Then they sought out BAWP methods and materials as a ready tool for bringing students up to proficiency levels in writing. Thus BAWP's impact should be viewed in the context of other powerful forces for change --- notably, the proficiency test requirements.

Changes reported by districts as occuring after BAWP inservice appeared in four areas besides the area of testing: teacher attitudes, classroom writing activities and assignments, student attitudes, and school or district-wide program planning. A summary of changes in these four areas reported by each of the three districts is given in Table 3.

Insert Table 3

Program Change Processes

Events leading to program change involve interactive processes with all of the following factors playing an important role:

--- use made of inservice training which provides curriculum materials and teaching techniques from an authoritative source such as BAWP

--- existence of a district plan or curriculum for improving writing skills

--- presence of an on-site contact person who carries the authority of the training agency (in this case, BAWP)

--- activities of district and school-site administrators in monitoring follow-up of inservice training and providing continuing support for inservice training.

--- coordination of proficiency standards and testing with content of the writing program

TABLE 3: REPORTED TYPES OF BAWP INSERVICE IMPACT*

		District A	District B	District C
I.	Teacher Change:			
	1. Greater awareness of writing problems/practices	X	X	X
	2. More positive attitude toward teaching writing	X	X	X
	3. Greater articulation among the teaching staff	X	X	X
	4. More sharing of student writing (or more publication of student writing)	X	X	X
	5. More consistent and critical standards for writing (resulting from holistic assessment)	X	X	X
II.	Curriculum Change:			
	1. Greater quantity of writing	X	X	
	2. More writing in different subjects	X	X	X
	3. Sharing of writing topics among staff	X		X
	4. More writing for different audiences	X		X
	5. More expressive writing	X	X	X
	6. Reorganization of course curriculum	X	X	X
III.	Program Change:			
	1. Development of district plan for writing instruction	X	X	
	2. Greater continuity in planning/instruction because of increased articulation	X	X	
	3. Development of teacher evaluation goals focusing on writing	X		
	4. Development of proficiency test which includes holistic assessment of student writing samples	(already planned)	X	X
	5. District-run inservices on writing	X	X	X
	6. Increase of support services/personnel (e.g. resource teachers) to assist with writing instruct.	X	X	
	7. Involvement of parents in holistic grading	X		
	8. Monthly meetings of teachers, administrators, and parents to look at writing samples	X		
IV.	Student change:			
	1. Students more willing to write	X	X	
	2. Students taking writing "more seriously"	X	X	X

* Because data sources varied among the districts, a quantitative analysis was impossible. For a type of impact to be indicated here, it had to be reported by at least one district administrator or teacher. The same effects could be present in all three districts, but have not been reported during the limited data collection efforts for this report.

Each of the three districts differs in the relationships among these factors.

District A: Here there has been strong encouragement for teachers to focus on improving writing skills, with district proficiency requirements serving as achievement goals at each level. Although the assistant superintendent monitors how individual teachers relate their assignments to proficiency goals (through the quarterly reports), there is no specific set of methods or materials mandated for all teachers. In fact, all the school-site administrators interviewed reported great variation in the teaching of writing; no school had a single program for all teachers and students. The school-site principals, particularly at the elementary levels felt they were the key coordinators in bringing organized improvement in writing skills. Because the district writing proficiencies were developed after the longer BAWP inservices, most teachers have gotten curriculum assistance from the BAWP-trained district writing resource teacher. This district offers an example then of centralized focus on goals, derived independently of BAWP, with assistance primarily from a BAWP-trained person in implementing and testing those goals.

District B: This district varies from the others in some interesting aspects. Once a district writing skills plan had been developed and adopted, BAWP personnel were used to provide appropriate training for implementation. District staff encouraged additional workshops and institutes at individual schools, but did not participate in any of the direct supervision of teachers' composition curricula as did administrators in District A. Centralized direction in setting goals was supplemented by BAWP inservice training of resource teachers who helped with implementation at local school sites.

District C: More than in either of the other two districts, a number of factors worked against the establishment of a cohesive writing skills program. Vocal parent criticism of the writing program meant that in the first year of inservice BAWP served as a bulwark against attack more than as an innovative change agent. In fact, at the end of the first year, participating teachers drew up a list of important ideas presented in the inservice and indicated for the courses at one high school, which of the ideas were already implemented and which the teachers intended to implement in the coming year. The list was meant to demonstrate to parents that many good ideas (i.e. ideas espoused by as prominent an organization as BAWP) were already being practiced. (The fact that 68% of the ideas were already being used by a majority of the English teachers also makes clear BAWP's role as a disseminator of promising practices already known to many professionals.)

The absence of a strong BAWP-trained representative on site (the inservice coordinator came from outside the district), the lack of a district plan for writing skills improvement, and the apparent absence of active follow-up by school site administrators all have worked to confine the BAWP experience primarily to individual teachers. The one exception to this pattern comes in one of the three high schools; there, the English department remains close-knit and willing to try out and share experiences about ideas presented in inservices. It is scarcely surprising that one of the teachers instrumental in getting BAWP inservices expressed the fear that without continued contact with BAWP, the concern for improving writing skills would diminish. BAWP has served as an ongoing focal point of activity in improving writing skills.

Without the extensive support or direction from district level administrators seen in the other two districts, its impact may only be momentary.

II. MEASURES OF WRITING PROFICIENCY, WRITING PROGRESS AND WRITING PROGRAMS

District tests of writing performance may be used for several different measurement purposes. It is important to distinguish among attempts to measure:

writing competence: AB 65 requires California school districts to develop standards of proficiency for advancing students to different levels, and to find ways of testing for proficiency in basic skills areas, including writing. The terms "writing competency" and "writing proficiency" may be used interchangeably to refer to district standards which may vary widely from place to place. Hence, "writing competency" may be defined in one district as the ability to write a letter ordering a ball point pen, while another district defines it as the ability to write a three-paragraph expository essay. The criteria for compentence used in judging performance on these different tasks will also vary, with one district accepting bare literacy as "competence" while another insists on some fluency, freedom from error, or even style and voice before declaring a student "proficient".

writing progress: Scores on competency tests have sometimes served as measures of progress or improvement in student writing skills. Data must be carefully collected and interpreted if test scores from different times in a student's career are to be used as measures of changes in ability. Actual improvement in writing skills is only one of many things which cause differences in student performance on tests given at different times.

writing programs: Scores of individual students on competency measures are frequently interpreted as measures of the effectiveness of the instructional program. Changes in student performance are taken to indicate changes in program effectiveness. Careful testing procedures should be instituted to minimize the number of factors affecting student performance which may confound the effects of the training program. A variety of measurements can be used to help verify that differences in student performance resulted from the effects of teaching rather than from other things, like initial differences among students in different programs, or the improvement expected to result from simple maturation.

Inservice districts have used the BAWP model of holistic assessment in an effort to measure all of these variables. Several districts have pointed to assessment data as evidence of improvement by individual

students, or as an indication of improvement in programs after BAWP inservice.

Sixteen local school districts (where teachers have experienced BAWP inservices or summer programs) have been surveyed to determine their use of holistic assessment for testing writing proficiency. Although all of them have received BAWP training in holistic assessment, they vary a great deal in the procedures they use. These are summarized in Table 4.

Insert Table 4

All the designs suffice to measure locally-set, district proficiency requirements. However, not all of them provide strong evidence of student writing progress, or changes in the overall impact of the instructional program from year to year.

Several important factors may limit the interpretation of writing assessment results in districts using the holistic assessment model. Some of these apply regardless of the testing instrument; others arise from the nature of holistic scoring.

Limits of Interpretation

Typically, the following difficulties appear in the district assessments reported below:

a) Many districts do not collect measures of student ability at the beginning of instruction, so that differences in initial ability of the student populations from year to year can be taken into account when comparing mean scores on the holistic writing assessment, which is usually given at the end of each teaching year.

b) Some districts have been inconsistent in testing times from year to year, so that yearly measures may represent different points in student development within a grade level.

c) To prevent "teaching to the test", or having students write essays with help before coming to the test, topics are changed from year to year in most districts. Only a few districts, however, report taking measures to check for equal difficulty and equal interest level of topics. (One district is using topics pilot-tested in writing assessments held in previous years at one high school in the district. Another district repeats the same task but uses a different photograph as stimulus. A few districts use similar topics from one year to the next, such as "describe a person", "describe an object".)

d) Each year a group of teachers is trained to read the new sample of papers, w[illegible]en to a new topic. A new set of anchor papers, from [illegible] current sample of student essays, is used for training. Two things may change from year to year: the characteristics of writing in the sample, and the standards and expectations of teacher/readers. In both cases, the result is that a score of, for example, 4, on a 1-6 point scale, may mean something different from one year to another. Comparisons made between years do not take into account possible differences in the meaning of scores given at different readings. (One district is trying to surmount this problem by giving papers in the middle range, which are boderline-passing, an analytic reading. Over a period of years they hope to develop a set of characteristics which will distinguish passing papers from failing ones with reference to the competency standards.)

Assessing Writing Proficiency and Writing Progress

The assessments, as administered, then, are adequate measures of the proficiency of the student population in one particular year, by the particular standards applied in that year's assessment. Results may also be used as an indication of student improvement from year to year, if the population being tested remains stable. In other words, we may compare the 9th grade scores of a student to his subsequent 10th,11th, and 12th grade scores to see his pattern of growth, if we can be sure the writing tasks from year to year are similar, and are graded by the same set of criteria. On the other hand, if we wish to describe the performance of a group of students, for instance the Class of 1980, as improving from year to year, we must be careful to note any changes in the make-up of that group, such as students leaving or new students enrolling in the school.

Of course, schools and districts should also look at external conditions which might have affected performance each year: was anything happening in the school or community which might cause a peak or a dip in test scores of students? With so many factors affecting performance on and scoring of writing tests, it is difficult to interpret differences in performance from year to year with any confidence.

Evaluating Writing Programs

It is hard to use typical district writing assessments as indicators of program impact. When students get better scores as a group from 9th to 10th to 11th grade, schools are justified in reporting these results with some satisfaction. But it is not entirely clear how much the students' improvement is due to particular qualities in the schools' instructional programs and how much is due to natural maturation and increases in general experience of students.

When a school makes changes in its program, the district may use assessment data from the first year (during or before staff training or curriculum development) to provide a baseline for comparison of performance in subsequent years under the new program. All of the factors which make it difficult to measure student progress from year to year, also make it hard to compare program impact from one year to the next. Differences in external factors affecting performance, and differences in the measure itself confound interpretation of assessment results as indicators of impact on students.

One further factor is even more important in evaluating changes in program. If a teacher compared the performance of her 9th grade students one year to the performance of her 9th grade students the next

year, using a single measure at the end of the year, she might expect the second year's students to perform better if she had improved her teaching methods. But the initial abilities of these ninth grade groups may have been different. If the second year's group is less proficient than the first group on entering the 9th grade, they may learn more, but fail to perform any better than their predecessors on the final test.

Some districts have additional measures of student ability for each incoming group which can be used to compare the achievement levels of students at a particular grade level from year to year. Where this is not done, however, improvements or regressions in performance from year to year may result simply from differences in the initial ability of students in the different years.

TABLE 4: A SUMMARY OF 16 DISTRICTS' USE OF HOLISTIC ASSESSMENT

	DISTRICT A +	DISTRICT B +	DISTRICT C +	DISTRICT D
years of wr. assess.	1976, 1977, 1978, 1979 (1 sample per year)	1976-77, 1977-78, 1978 - 1979 (1 sample per year)	1978 - 1979 (1 sample per year)	1977 - 1978 (pre-post sample) 1979: 1 sample only
grade levels	all students, 4 - 12	all 8th and 10th gr. some 9th gr.	9	4 - 12 all 9th and 10th gr.
# papers read per yr.	approx. 20,000	3200	about 1350	2500: pre 2500: post 16000
# stud. in dist.	k - 12: 21,000	k - 12: 12,500	9 - 12: 4500	K - 12: 53,300
topics	-different every year for every gr. level (see Table 5)	-different topic every year for ea. gr. level	give directions (failing students given separate tasks)	descr. person/ descr. object -write letter asking for job -describe a favorite person
rubric: pt. scale	-use anchor papers 1 - 9 scale	1 - 3 scale	1 - 9 scale	both readings: used 1 - 6 pt. scale and anchor papers
ID of readers	district teachers, plus lay readers and parents	district English teachers	district English teachers	1976 BAWP Summer Fellows dist. Engl. teachers, some of whom had been in BAWP inservice
Reading procedures	each grade level read separately	each grade level read separately by each school	all papers read over two-day period	all papers read in a single reading
Funding support	district	IV C; NEH-BAWP; district	district	Title IV C, district district
purpose of assess.	to test district's own competency prog. + state's	state proficiency requirements	state proficiency requirements	Title IV C prog. eval. + get description of stu. wr. 4 - 12 state proficiency requirements
link to prof. stnd. or curric. *	failing tests are diagnosed coded to prof. req. and returned to students' teachers	failures diagnosed and papers returned to students' teachers	failures get papers back; take remedial writing lab classes where receive description of good and bad papers	booklet and report published all papers sent back to teachers + 2 day workshop for dept. chm. to expl. standards & errors
results in form of	% passing competency standards at each level	% passing competency standards at each level	% passing competency standards	% attaining each score plus % passing comp. stnds.

* refers to "link to proficiency standards of writing curriculum"

\+ this district was included in the "Three Case Studies" (Section I of this report)

TABLE 4: A SUMMARY OF 16 DISTRICTS' USE OF HOLISTIC ASSESSMENT

	DISTRICT E	DISTRICT F	DISTRICT G	DISTRICT H
years of wr. assessment	Fall 1978 Fall 1979	Sept. 1977 - May 1978 1979	Oct. 1976, 77, 78	1978 1979
grade levels	K - 8 9,10	7, 8, 10, 12 10, 11	6 - 12	7 - 12
# papers read per year	1500 300	Pre = 330 Post = 313 about 110	7500	5350
# students in district	K - 12: 2,125	K - 12: 860	K - 12: 14,000 (6 - 12: 7,806)	K - 12: 10,500
topics	different for each grade (see list) different tasks (see list)	Pre: describe object Post: describe person write business letter	different for each school (see list)	describe object describe ideal dwelling place
rubric: point scale	1 - 3 general categories 1 - 3 general categories	1 - 9 specific 1 - 3 general; analytic assessment of failures	1 - 9 specific	anchor papers used 1 - 9 scale
ID of readers	elementary teachers high school English teachers and aides	teachers K - 12 high school English teachers	grade 6 - 12 English teachers	7 - 12 English teachers plus student teachers from UC Berkeley
reading procedures	each grade level read separately each grade level read separately	all papers read in a single reading papers read in two afternoons	papers read separately by grade level (6 - 8, 9 - 12) and by school	papers read over two days no regard for grade level
funding support	district	IVC evaluation district	IVC and district	district IVC
purpose of assessment	proficiency & district assessment proficiency requirement	IVC evaluation proficiency requirements	1976-77 state of writing skills 1978 proficiency require.	proficiency standards and district writing assessment
link to prof. stnd. or curriculum	papers returned to teachers failures counseled into remedial classes	discussion of standards experience of holistic failures analyzed & return to teachers & students	failing papers analyzed and returned to English department chairman	all papers sent back to teachers and discussed with students
results in form of	% passing competency standards at each level	mean pre and post % passing competency standards at each level	frequencies at each point score for each grade level	% passing competency standards at each level frequencies at each point score for each grade level

TABLE 4: A SUMMARY OF 16 DISTRICTS' USE OF HOLISTIC ASSESSMENT

	DISTRICT I	DISTRICT J	DISTRICT K	DISTRICT L
years of wr. assessment	1976, 78, 79 1979	October 1978 May 1979	1977-78 1978-79	1977, 78, 79
grade levels	3, 5 (+8,9 before 1979) 8 plus failures	7 - 12 6	9th plus previous failures	3, 5, 7
# papers read per yr.	3 and 5: 240 1000 plus	2800 about 900	2500	726 - 806
# students in district	K - 12: 12,637	K - 12: 8000	K - 12: 15,000	K - 8: 3,000
topics	see list	Describe imaginary place Describe an object + Business letter + dictation	business letter expository paragraph (different each year)	same task: different photograph (see list for prompt)
rubric: point scale	specific skills list 1 - 3 general	1 - 9 holistic analytic and holistic	1 - 4 holistic plus error count	use anchor papers 1 - 4 scale
ID of readers	3 - 5 English teachers 20 district English teach.	six English teachers representing each school three district teachers	teachers from all schools	district teachers
reading procedures	grades read separately papers read once borderline/passing reread then analyzed	all papers read in a single reading	read on Saturday readers paid	all papers read in a single reading
funding support	district	district	district	district
purpose of assessment	program evaluation proficiency requirement	proficiency requirement	proficiency requirement	district assessment and proficiency requirement
link to prof. stnd. or curriculum	report with examples given to teachers report given to teachers: failures analyzed and returned to students	failures analyzed and returned to teachers papers given back to classroom teachers	failures analyzed and returned to teachers failing students put in remedial class	booklet given to all teachers showing examples of papers and standards
results in form of	report with examples % passing competency standards at each level	% passing competency standards at each level	% passing competency standards at each level	frequencies at each point score for each grade level

TABLE 4: A SUMMARY OF 16 DISTRICTS' USE OF HOLISTIC ASSESSMENT

years of wr. assessment	Pre - Fall 1978 Post - Spring 1979	STEP -(1964 - 1976)	1975, 76, 77, 78, 79 Fall (9th) Spring (11th)	1979
grade levels	4 - 8	9 1977: 6-12; 1978-79: 9-12	9 and 11	8 - 12 every fourth year (only 8th grade in intervening years)
# papers read per year	pre = 1665 post = 1665	1213	3000	8 - 12 = 8000
# students in district	K - 8: 3300	9 - 12: 2500	9 - 12: 7000	9 - 12: 6000 (8 = 2000)
topics	pre: my favorite object post: when I was younger (describe experience)	not available	see list	see list
rubric: point scale	1 - 9 general	1 - 7 specific	1 - 9 general	1 - 9 general
ID of readers	teachers from each school	high school English teachers plus lay readers and graduate students	20 English teachers	75 high school English teachers
reading procedures	papers read separately (pre and post) (some papers from Fall were mixed into Spring to test scoring competency)	papers read separately for 9th grade and high school	Fall and Spring papers read separately in a single reading	all papers read in a single reading
funding support	IVC	district	district	district
purpose of assessment	IVC evaluation and proficiency standards	placement in composition program proficiency requirement	9th: Proficiency standard 11th: assess district program	assess own English program proficiency standards
link to prof. stnd. or curriculum	describe strengths and weaknesses at each grade level	papers kept in student file	all papers given back to students for one day 9th grade shared with feeder schools failures put in cum folder	copies of failing papers returned to teachers writing folders kept on failures to monitor progress
results in form of	frequencies at each point score for each grade level	% passing competency standards at each level frequencies at each point score for each grade level	% passing competency standards at each level each principal receives school & district mean	% passing competency standards at each level
	DISTRICT M	DISTRICT N	DISTRICT O	DISTRICT P

TABLE 5: Examples of Topics Used in Holistic Assessments

DISTRICT:	TOPIC or TASK:
A	-(fourth grade) Write a descriptive statement about a topic at least two sentences long (e.g. "I wish I had..."
	-(fifth grade) Write a story (narrative) using at least four sentences correctly capitalized and punctuated (e.g."One day I found a magic machine...")
	-(sixth grade) Write a descriptive paragraph using correct mechanics and form (e.g. "Describe your favorite animal.")
	-(seventh grade) Write an expository paragraph using correct mechanics and form (e.g. "My favorite holiday is ... because...")
	-(eighth grade) Write two paragraphs of narration, description, or exposition with varied sentence structure and correct mechanics and form. (e.g. "My favorite season is ... because...")
	-(high school) Develop a single idea and provide supporting details in one or more paragraphs, using correct mechanics and grammar, so that understanding is not impaired (e.g. "My favorite place is..." "Explain how to do something so that someone else could do it.")
E	All prompts asked students to write a descriptive statement using the sentence given:
	-(first grade) You have a magic ring and rub it.
	-(second grade) One day it rained purple rain.
	-(third grade) When I woke up I was 2" tall.
	-(fourth grade) My favorite possession
	-(fifth grade) My favorite possession
	-(sixth grade) A personal incident with some exaggeration
	-(seventh grade) You are there and the first person to respond to the discovery of time.
	-(eighth grade) I feel very uneasy when the assistant principal walks in.
	-(high school) My room is a mess Also write a job application, a business letter and envelope, map directions and listen to a phone message and write it down
G	-(sixth, seventh, eighth grades) "When I was younger..." Describe
	-(high school) 1) All of us probably have a secret desire to be another person. Who would it be and why? 2) Everybody has experienced fear. Write about a time when you were afraid. 3) If you had to change places with someone for a day, who would it be and why? What would you do during that day?

TABLE 5 continued

I	-(third grade) Letter writing -(fifth grade) Writing of envelopes, letters and dialogues -(eighth grade) Pick something of your very own which you have a strong feeling about. (Do not choose a person or a pet dog or cat or other animal.) Then tell your reader what it looks like so that he can picture it in his mind the way that you do. -(ninth grade) Describe a happy experience.
L	Look carefully at the picture. Then think about what might have happened before the picture was taken, what is going on in the picture, what will possibly happen next, and who else might be involved who is not in the picture. Then write a story about your ideas. The idea is to write about what the picture means to you; use a little time for planning before you start to write.
O	-(ninth and tenth grades) Think about a change in your life which was important to you. In some detail describe this change and tell how it has made you a different person. -(eleventh grade) We constantly hear that television is a bad influence on our lives. We hear that it teaches people to be violent and to commit crimes. We hear that it tempts people to stay "glued to the boob tube" instead of talking to each other or reading. In short, in one way or another, television seems to be blamed for all that is bad in our lives. Yet most of us watch television and can undoubtedly see some good in it. Choose and discuss one or two ways in which you think that television is of benefit to individuals, to families, or even to society. Use specific examples to support your ideas.
P	If you could follow someone around for a day, either in person or invisibly, whom would you choose? You might want to write about someone you admire, a friend, a famous person, a personality type, someone with a particular job. You might want to think about these questions: Why would you be interested in that person's activities? What is that person like? What would that person's day be like? You may do this writing as a story about the day, a letter, an essay a biographical sketch, or some other form.